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HOW DANTE  
CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN

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ROSE E. SELFE

WITH A PREFACE  
BY THE LORD BISHOP OF RIPON

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BEFORE THE THRESHOLD.

[Frontispiece.]

(See p. 47.)

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and the Journey.

BY E. B. SULLIVAN.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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# HOW DANTE CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN.

*Sunday Readings with the Children*

FROM THE "PURGATORIO."

BY

ROSE E. SELFE.

WITH A PREFACE BY

THE LORD BISHOP OF RYPPON.

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"LAY THINE UPHILL SHOULDER TO THE WHEEL,  
AND CLIMB THE MOUNT OF BLESSING."

*Tennyson "The Ancient Saga."*

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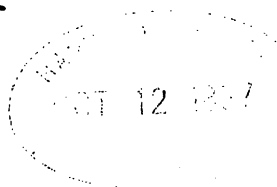
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AFTER GUSTAVE DORÉ.

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## PREFACE.

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IT is a happy thing that all the highest and best truth is the common heritage of the great and the small, of the wise and the simple. Truth which cannot be made simple is not truth of the highest order; but the works of great masters, when they tell truth, do not always tell it in the form which the simplest can understand. The great of the earth give high nutriment, but it cannot reach the simple folk unbroken: there is truth in their writings which the simplest may feed upon; but it needs some friendly hand to break and distribute it.

To attempt this is a worthy task, for it is to minister nourishment to many minds. To do this for children is to do them a double good: it gives them high thoughts which can never wholly leave them, and it puts into their hand the key which in the future of riper knowledge can unlock countless and priceless treasures.

Miss Selfe has undertaken the task of doing this with a portion of Dante's great poem, and in these

pages opens to children the scenes of the "Purgatorio." The aim appears to me right and fit. One would not too early familiarise childhood with the weird and terrible scenes of the "Inferno;" and the "Paradiso" would be beyond their powers; but the story of the Purgatory is within their grasp, and is full of clear, bright teaching; rightly used, it becomes a sort of "Pilgrim's Progress," full of deep truth and life-lessons.

In days of little books, any effort to make great books part of the inheritance of childhood should be welcomed and encouraged.

W. B. RIPON.

*The Palace, Ripon.*

# HOW DANTE CLIMBED THE MOUNTAIN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DREAMS : WHAT THEY MEAN.

"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II. CORINTHIANS iv. 18.

"The new vision which absorbs me so,  
I cannot from its contemplation flee."\*

PURGATORIO, Canto xix. 56, 57.

THE story I want to tell you is part of a dream which came to a man nearly 600 years ago, in which he saw many wonderful and beautiful things, and some very terrible ones also. When I say a dream, I do not, of course, mean such confused visions as come to us all now and again when we are asleep, which seem to mean little or nothing, and are nearly always entirely forgotten by us as soon as we begin our waking life

\* The quotations from Dante placed at the head of the various chapters are taken throughout from the Dean of Wells' beautiful translation, published in 1886, for which every English student of Dante must be grateful.

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again. I am thinking more of dreams such as those which we read of in the Bible, when God spoke to men of old to warn or encourage them, and taught them by showing them truths which they could not learn in the daily life around them.

In these Bible "dreams" we can share also; the story of them has been told to us by God's Holy Spirit, that we might have some glimpse through them into the spiritual world which is behind the world we see around us every day. And although the Bible has been closed, and no more visions come to us from Hebrew Saints or Prophets, yet God still speaks to some chosen few, and gives them visions and revelations which are not given to all, but which they can sometimes put into words for the help and teaching of those who come after.

One such vision I expect you have all read and enjoyed. I mean that of John Bunyan, who "saw in his dream" the whole Pilgrim's Progress of Christian on his way from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City—all the difficulties he met with, the Slough of Despond, the lions, the giants, the Hill Difficulty, and the Valley of the Shadow of Death, besides the refreshments and enjoyments he had, in the Interpreter's house, at House Beautiful, among the Delectable Mountains, and in the land of Beulah. If it were

not for the happy parts of the journey, I don't think we could enjoy the book half so much as we do ; but these seem to tell us that God means us to enjoy all the pleasant things which He sends us, and that they are to strengthen and refresh us for the difficulties and conflicts which we shall certainly meet with upon our path.

But I must not talk any more about Bunyan's dream, as you can read that for yourselves. The vision I want to tell you about came to an Italian named Dante, and he has written it for us in a long poem of about 14,000 lines. Besides its being in Italian, it is written in such an old-fashioned way (for Dante died about 565 years ago) that those who know Italian quite well find a difficulty in reading it without help ; and added to this, there are very many thoughts and conversations in it which children could not possibly hope to understand, so that I feel sure you would not care to try to read Dante's poem for yourselves as yet ; but if I could, by telling you some part of the story now, make you sufficiently interested in his vision to wish when you are grown up to overcome all the difficulties, and read the poem itself, I should feel that I had introduced you to one of the books which, more than most others, will give you joy, and teaching, and help for your pilgrimage through life.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE CITY OF FLOWERS.

"A citizen of no mean city."—ACTS xxi. 39.

"Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."—  
HEBREWS xiii. 14.

"I had my birth and found my home  
In the great city hard by Arno fair."

INFERNO xxiii. 95, 96.

"Rejoice, O Florence, since so great thy fame  
That over sea and land thy wings are spread."

INFERNO xxvi. 1, 2.

BEFORE entering upon the vision, I should like to tell you what an Italian city was like in those old days when Dante lived in Florence, and what kind of life went on in the narrow streets and among the beautiful buildings, many of which remain, and are a joy to all of us who are able to visit Italy. I must not forget, however, that many of the most beautiful churches and palaces of Florence were not built at the time when Dante was alive. Scarcely any of the great painters and sculptors and builders who have since made Florence so famous had begun their works so early as the year 1265, when the poet was

born ; but even then the city must have been very beautiful and picturesque.

Florence is built on both sides of the river Arno, and four bridges connect the two parts of the town. Here and there the narrow streets widen out into an open square, or piazza, as they call it in Italy, very like the market places we see in our country towns. On one of these squares stands the Old Palace, which was the chief public building of Florence, half Town Hall and half Parliament House, where the rulers of the city met to transact business. On another piazza stood, and still stands, the Baptistery, the old round church to which every Florentine baby was taken to be baptised. On every such open place the citizens of Florence were wont to meet and talk and dispute, and quarrel—alas ! very fiercely at times. For Italians are very hasty and passionate ; and at the time of which I speak there were many jealousies and divisions within the narrow limits of the city.

Italy was not governed then, as it now is, by one king over the whole country, but each city had its own government. Florence was ruled by magistrates, chosen by the people. They held their office for two months only ; and as you know in our own Parliament we have two great parties who



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in turn are called on to form a Government, so in Florence were many parties and divisions, and the struggles between them were very fierce and desperate, and often ended in the party who were uppermost for the time driving their opponents out of the city altogether.

This is a very different picture from life in England nowadays. Happily the Conservatives or the Liberals, when they come into power, do not drive the opposite party out of the country, destroy their houses, and endeavour in every way to prevent them from ever returning to their life at home ; but I am telling you this of the Florentine factions, to make you realise a little the sort of life in which the poet Dante had grown up. Oftentimes as he walked about his native town, by the side of the Arno, or through the streets and open squares, he must have seen sad sights—street fights, and men wounded or even killed in the sudden quarrels which arose. He heard too, I doubt not, as a boy, much talk about the rival parties, and the reasons for adhering to the one side or the other. And I expect, as he was unusually wise and thoughtful, that he early began to form ambitious plans for himself of the days when he would take part in the government, and help to heal the divisions and bring peace to his distracted city.

But life in Florence was not all fighting and political contests. There was another and more peaceful aspect of it ; and side by side with the contending parties, the politicians and soldiers, were bankers and merchants, living a prosperous life and making large fortunes ; and there were artists illuminating beautiful manuscripts, and beginning to paint pictures on the walls of churches and monasteries, sculptors carving in bronze and marble, builders raising churches and palaces, poets spending their time in giving forth lovely verses, and scholars and students occupied with the great writings of past ages.

To which of all these many classes did the poet Dante belong ? Well, we may feel quite sure that he shared in almost all these many occupations and pursuits. He was a politician certainly—he took an active part in the government of his country, was ambassador from the Florentine Republic to some of the neighbouring states, and in the year 1300 he even rose to be one of the eight Priori, or chief magistrates, who held supreme power in the city for a period of two months. He had served as a soldier also, and taken part in battles, before he was twenty-five years old. This was his outside public life ; but what of his inner life, of thought, and study, and art ?

Dante was one of the greatest scholars, as well as

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one of the deepest philosophers and grandest poets, whom the world has ever seen. His life was one of constant study—of history, science, philosophy, and religion. His greatest guide was the Latin poet Virgil, who flourished under the Emperor Augustus, and whose works were loved and studied by scholars all through the Middle Ages.

Dante was very much interested in art also. Among his friends were painters, musicians, and poets, and he himself had begun writing beautiful sonnets when he was still quite young.

What a many-sided life ! It seems at first sight as if it must have been a very happy life, in that quaint, picturesque city by the river Arno, with the sun pouring down upon the tall houses, and the roses and other flowers growing brightly everywhere ; and Dante must have been conscious of his own brilliant powers and gifts, and must have felt able to control the fortunes of his beloved city, and to enrich his own life by study and art, as well as to enrich the world by his beautiful poems, winning enduring fame for himself both as a ruler and as a poet.

But if we inquire more closely into Dante's mind and thoughts, we shall find that he was too earnest, and too much occupied with the deepest questions of life, to have much time or care for personal happiness.

Under the sunshine and bright skies of Italy, amid the feasting and fighting, the love-making, the money-making, the countless interests and occupations of his native city, he lived grave, earnest, melancholy. He saw beneath the outside show of things, and knew that this life on earth is not our only life—that it is only a part of the whole life on which we enter at our birth. He saw many men sinning and indulging themselves as if this world were all, and as if God had not called on us all to awake to a higher life, to grow in goodness and beauty, and in likeness to the Father who made us.

He saw men proud of their position and high family, ambitious of power and influence, and vain of their gifts and learning, exalting themselves above their fellows, envying those who had more advantages than themselves, hating and despising their opponents, and constantly breaking out into fierce wrath and passion, and injuring and even killing those who differed from them.

How unlike is this picture to the picture shown us in the Bible of the *love that suffereth long and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not its own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil!*

Again, Dante saw around him many who were

lazy and indifferent, who made no efforts in God's service, and who, though they might call themselves Christians, did not care to fight under Christ's banner against sin and wrong, or to make any sacrifice for His sake.

There were yet more sins which Dante, alas! saw around him: sins of money-getting and money-spending. Merchants so eager for gain, and spend-thrifts so anxious to get all that money could buy, that no time was left for heavenly thoughts or aspirations; and there were sad temptations to self-pleasing to which his countrymen gave way, feasting and drinking without moderation, and other selfish pleasures into which men are led when they allow themselves to think first of their own ease and enjoyment, instead of God's service, and of love to their neighbour.

All these temptations were around Dante in the city of Florence, and to some of them he himself gave way, scholar, poet, lofty-minded patriot as he was. Pride and arrogance, the sense of superiority to his fellows, was, we find, his great snare, and this is perhaps the root of many other sins. But God had a great work for Dante to do—he was to be as a prophet with a message from the Lord against all such sins, and before he could give this message he was obliged to leave his beloved Florence and suffer

many trials and privations, and learn to look at things as they really are.

When Dante was thirty-six years old he was exiled from Florence on accusation of having acted unjustly when he was in power, and he was not to return to the city at all, on pain of being burned alive! The rest of Dante's life is very sad. It was taken up for the most part in plans for returning to his native city, from which he felt he had been unjustly banished. None of these plans were successful, and he went from one place to another, and his heart was very sad and restless, and very angry with his fellow-citizens for having banished him from the city which he had loved so well and which he would have served so faithfully.

It was during these twenty-one years of wanderings that he wrote his great poem, in which he tells us of his vision of the unseen world. But before going on to speak of that, I must tell you of one other fact in his life, which made it different from other people's. When he was nine years old, his father took him to a party at the house of a friend who lived near them in Florence. This friend had a little daughter of eight years old, called Beatrice, and as soon as Dante saw this little girl, a great love for her entered his heart. This love for Beatrice, which began so early, never left him. He loved her all his life, and

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when the vision came to him of the unseen world, Beatrice was one of the principal figures in it, and it was chiefly in hope of seeing her that he was encouraged to climb the steep mountain of which I am going to tell you. Dante did not often see Beatrice. Once, he tells us, he met her walking in the streets between two gracious ladies, and she gave him a sweet greeting, on which he thought very much afterwards; but this was nine years after their first meeting. Soon after this Beatrice married, and she died when Dante was twenty-five years old. But he loved her and thought of her always, and it was, I think, because of his great love for her that he was able to write down his vision so wonderfully. He wanted to tell others something of what such a deep, true love as his for Beatrice brings into our lives.

The thought of this lady, lovely, pure, and good, was always a help to Dante to live a higher life, as the thought of all those who are better than ourselves ought to help us in hours of temptation; and as Beatrice was called away thus early to the Heavenly Home, she became, as it were, a guiding star to him through his earthly pilgrimage, and the hope of meeting her again in the near presence of God cheered and inspired him all his life long.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MOUNTAIN OF PURIFICATION.

“Perfect through sufferings.”—HEBREWS ii. 10.

“Hence comes it that by sufferings they are taught.”

VIRGIL, *Æneid* vi. 740.

“This mount is such that still

Beginning from below, 'tis rough and steep ;

But as one climbs, the less he finds it ill.”

PURGATORIO iv. 88-90.

“AS I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place . . . and I laid me down in that place to sleep ; and as I slept I dreamed a dream.” So Bunyan begins his “Pilgrim’s Progress.” The vision that is given to him is “of this world ;” the vision that is given to Dante is of the world to come.

Not very much has been told us in the Bible about the future life after death, but we know that those who have gone to be with God are at peace and rest—that the promise to them is that *they shall walk with Him arrayed in white garments ; they serve Him day and night in His Temple ; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike*



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*upon them, nor any heat ; that Christ Himself shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes ; death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning. His servants shall do Him service, and they shall see His face.*

All these promises have been made to us through the mouth of St. John, to whom were given so many visions of heaven and heavenly things. Life for ever, no more death ; joy for ever, no more sorrow or tears ; no more pain, or hunger, or thirst, but rest, and glad service of which we can never weary. Is not this a beautiful picture of the Paradise of God, which His love is preparing for us ? But we must remember who it is to whom these promises are made—it is to *him who overcometh*—it is *the pure in heart* who shall see God.

For all those who have loved their Father here, and striven to please Him, Dante felt that the happiness of Heaven was open at once, as soon as they had passed through the grave and gate of Death. His blessed lady Beatrice and others, he believed, had gone straight to God's presence, but during his life on earth he had seen a great deal of sin, both in the lives of others and in himself. He saw many people very selfish, and proud, and lazy, and unloving, and greedy ;

and it seemed to him that they could not at their death go straight to be with God, like the pure and holy saints whose lives had been filled with love to God and to their neighbours. Of course, he knew that our Lord has died for all men, and wants us all to be saved, and to be with Him for ever ; but what seemed to him to be true was that as soon as we pass away from this earth, we shall see the hatefulness of sin and the purity of God, and that we shall long to be purified from sin, and become like unto Him ; and that He, in His love, has provided a place where, by enduring some pain and punishment suited to our wrong-doings and want of love here, we may be made ready to be free from pain evermore with our Father in Heaven. And this place he calls the Mountain of Purification.

We cannot know whether this is actually the case or not. God has not chosen that anyone should visit the other world and bring us back a report of what is passing there. So that in one sense it never really happened that Dante in his mortal body visited the unseen world, and saw with his eyes the spirits of those who had passed away from this earth. But in this poem he believes he was shown what those spirits feel when they have left their mortal life behind them—how their only longing is to be blest with the near

presence of God—that they know this cannot be as long as they are stained by any sin to which they have given way on earth ; and how glad they are to suffer if by this means they may be purified from sin, and made free to ascend joyfully to the presence of their Father.

My aim in telling you this story now is not so much to turn your thoughts to the future life, of which so little has been told us, but to draw from Dante's dream of that other world some lessons for our life here. It is a story of effort and toil, of pain seen and endured ; but the efforts are willingly made, and the suffering is gladly borne, because the dwellers on the Mount of Purification, which I should like even to call the Mount of Blessing, know that it is a loving Father's hand that sends the discipline, and that all the toil and pain will end at last in joy. I see an abiding lesson for ourselves in Dante's climbing up the steep and rugged mountain.

Is our life here likely to be an easy pleasure, or is it not rather to be a constant ascent of a mountain-side, oftentimes very steep and stony, in which our strength and courage will be severely tried, and in which we shall without doubt lose our way, and incur great risks and dangers, unless we have some sure Guide to lead us upward, and to cheer us by

encouraging words of promise and help? And is there not the same blessed goal at the top of our mountain as awaited Dante when he had finished his ascent? Our steep, and stony, and slippery path will come to an end at last, and we shall find ourselves at home in the "Father's house." But I would not have you think that this mountain journey, to which I have compared our life on earth, is to be all pain and weariness. There are joys in the very effort of climbing which are unknown to those who live always on the low plains. The sense of difficulties overcome, of progress made, is in itself delightful, and the air of the mountains grows purer and more refreshing the higher one ascends; and, as Dante found also, there are green pastures and living waters among the hills, where the climbers may pause and find rest and refreshment, and gather new strength for the remainder of the journey. On our pilgrimage, too, as on his, there are happy meetings with friends, who give us sympathy and love, and who are allowed to go part, if not all, of the way in company with us. On Dante's mountain, and on ours, prayers and hymns rise continually to the Lord who calls us to make this journey, and who will welcome us at the summit with some such joyful words as—*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared*

*for you, or, He that overcometh shall inherit all things.*

In the course of his journey, Dante had to see and endure many painful things. The spirits whom he met with as he went up the mountain were all suffering in some way, and in one or two cases Dante himself was called on to share their pain, but he knew that these souls were being made "perfect through suffering," and by the sight of them which he had in his dream he was taught many deep lessons to help him for the rest of his life on earth, and these lessons we in turn may learn from him. We cannot too early realise that if we do wrong we must surely suffer for it, and I think, if we read the story rightly, we shall have quite a new idea about pain, and the help it may be to us. In those old days men were taught that *after death* they would gladly welcome pain because it would make them pure and holy; but *we* have learned that this purification may begin here on earth, and is going on now in our own lives, and in the lives of those around us. When we are children, some of this purifying pain comes to us through our parents and teachers, in the form of punishment for our wrong-doing, and these punishments, though hard to bear at the time, should really be welcomed by us as the painful consequences of wrong, and as

helping us to resist temptation another time. As we grow older, the pain does not come to us so directly through others, but still it comes as a consequence of sin. Think of the miserable sufferings which come to us if we give way to jealous or envious feelings ; or if we are angry and passionate. And so it is after every yielding to temptation. And even those sufferings, such as bodily illness, or the loss of friends, which do not seem to have anything directly to do with our right or wrong doings, are truly sent to us by our loving Father, to teach us some lesson of patience or submission, or to give us more insight into the true life beyond, so that they, too, have a share in the work of purification which Dante dreamed of as going on after death, but which we know to have already begun here.

## CHAPTER IV.

### VIRGIL THE GUIDE.

“They went astray . . . out of the way.”—Ps. cvii. 4. (Prayer Book.)

“Jesus saith, I am the way, the truth, and the life.”—ST. JOHN xiv. 6.

“On then ; one only will is in us twain ;  
Thou Leader art, thou Lord, and thou my Guide.”

INFERNO ii. 139, 140.

WE have now seen something of Dante's life, both public and private, and what the world was like which he saw around him every day, and the sins which he witnessed, and, alas! shared in to some extent. Now we are to hear of the vision which God sent him to bring him back into the narrow way, and to teach him and us about the true life which underlies the outward show of things. In his dream he made a journey to the other world, and seemed to see a mountain where the spirits were being prepared for Paradise. After this he visited Heaven, and saw Christ and all the blessed and happy ones who were rejoicing in the many mansions. But I am only going now to tell you about part of his dream, and some day I hope you will read the rest for yourselves.





THE DARK FOREST.





Dante's dream begins by his finding himself alone in a dark wood, into which he had wandered in his sleep. Through this wood, wild and uncultivated, and bristling with thorns, he found it most difficult to force his way, and his heart often failed him for fear; but at length, after a night of struggle and misery, he found himself at the foot of a hill, and looking up was gladdened by the sight of the sun shining on the slope high above him. Then was his fear a little quieted.

Dante stayed to rest his weary body a while, and then began the ascent of the hill. But here new difficulties met him—first a panther with spotted coat, very swift and nimble in his movements, appeared on the path, and so impeded his progress that more than once Dante had well-nigh turned to go back. However, it was a sweet spring morning, and the sun was mounting in the heavens, and Dante felt hopeful enough not to be overcome even by this fierce beast. But, alas! a lion now appeared, holding his head high, and looking furiously hungry, and followed by a wolf, lean and greedy-looking. These so overwhelmed Dante with fear that he lost all hope of attaining the summit of the mountain. Sad and despondent, he found himself little by little forced back to the foot of the hill, quite out of the sunlight.

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Not by our own efforts can we get back into the sunshine of God's favour when we have wilfully wandered from it into the darkness. Sins and temptations seem to rise before us and drive us back, as Dante was driven back by those terrible beasts. But our Father does not leave us alone in our sadness. While Dante was feeling utterly cast down in that low place, a figure appeared before him, to whom Dante cried out, "Have pity upon me, whatever thou art, whether a shadow or a living man." Great was his surprise when the figure replied to him that he was the spirit of the Roman poet Virgil, dead so long ago, whose works Dante had loved and studied, and from whom he had learnt so much.

Reverently Dante greeted the famous sage, and prayed him for his aid against the wolf whose appearance had overwhelmed him with fear and trembling.

But Virgil told him that he could not hope to ascend the beautiful mountain by this short road, but by another and more difficult way ; that he was prepared to guide him thither, and to show him many things by the way : among others, Virgil promised to let him see the spirits of those who, having left this earth, were waiting in hope of the blessedness of heaven. Dante therefore consented to follow him.

Day was now departing, and all men were preparing

for rest during the night, but Dante alone had no time to rest ; he had a long journey and many experiences before him. Some cowardly feelings he had to overcome before venturing upon this unknown enterprise ; and to encourage him Virgil told him who had sent him, and how it was that he had come thus unexpectedly to his assistance. He said that in his place in the unseen world his name had suddenly been called by a blessed and beautiful lady, with eyes shining more brightly than the sun ; she had spoken to him as the angels speak, gently and softly, and had prayed him to hasten to the help of a friend of hers who was in misfortune, who had met with such obstacles on his way that he had turned back from fear ; she added she was almost afraid he might be already lost, for she had only just left her place in heaven to entreat succour for him. Her last words were : " I am Beatrice, who do make thee go. I come from the place whither I would fain return ; I was moved by love, which now makes me speak."

Think how Dante's heart must have rejoiced on hearing the name of his beloved lady, and learning that love had sent her from her blessed seat in heaven to rescue him from his distress. Virgil went on to tell him more of his conversation with Beatrice, and of two other of the heavenly inhabitants, who had aroused

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her to a knowledge of the danger and difficulty in which the friend who had so loved her now found himself. These gentle ladies were Divine Compassion and Illuminating Grace ; they had united themselves with Love, represented by Beatrice, in their care for Dante ; and Virgil urged him no longer to delay, since three blessed ladies were caring for him in the heavenly courts, and since he himself promised him so great a good if he would follow him. Dante's courage had now quite returned. The thought of Beatrice's compassion in thus succouring him, and Virgil's goodness in obeying her injunction so quickly, had filled his heart with desire to follow ; so the two set forth on their road through the dense forest.

Does not this opening of the dream teach us many things? The thick forest speaks of the darkness and difficulty in which we find ourselves when we forsake God's paths ; and the three heavenly ladies, Compassion and Grace and Love, tell us of the care which is ever watching over us to bring us back to Him. But what about the heathen poet Virgil, who is to guide our Christian poet through the other world? Perhaps God wished thus to teach Dante that though Virgil was not blessed as we are, by being born into the world after Christ had taken our nature upon Him and lived and died for us

on earth, yet all true poetry and wisdom is inspired by God Himself, and all true poets and thinkers may thus lead us on the road to Him. Dante says elsewhere very beautifully of Virgil that he was like a man who carries a lantern behind him through the night and does not profit by it himself, but throws light on the path of those who come after him. So all Dante's devoted study of Virgil's writings had led him nearer to God, who is the Source of all truth, though Virgil himself had not had the blessedness of knowing and believing in God the Father or in our Lord Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ANGEL AT THE HELM.

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"—HEBREWS i. 14.

"And I shall know him when we meet."

TENNYSON, "In Memoriam."

"The heavenly Pilot on the stern upright  
Stood, with all blessing on his look enrolled,  
And in it sat a hundred spirits bright."

PURGATORIO ii. 43-45.

THROUGH the first part of their journey I do not intend to follow the travellers. It was a very dark and terrible road over which they had to pass, and Dante's heart many times failed him for fear, even though he loved and trusted his guide and master so entirely. But through the darkness and the terrible sights and sounds, Dante knew that God was leading him and teaching him, as He so often does lead us through what is painful and hard to understand, to the fuller knowledge of His truth, and justice, and righteousness.

It was on the evening of Good Friday that Virgil and Dante began their journey. On the early morning

of Easter Monday, an hour and a half before dawn, they left the dreadful darkness and sad sights behind them, and came forth into the starlight once more. They now found themselves at the foot of a mountain. At first Dante could think of nothing but the loveliness of the night, the bright shining of the stars overhead, and the sweet sapphire-blue colour of the sky, but after having refreshed his eyes with all this beauty, he had leisure to look about him, and saw that they were no longer alone. An old man stood before them, whose venerable white hair and beard inspired Dante with reverence and respect. His face was so illuminated by the bright starlight that it was as if the sun was shining upon them. This was Cato, the guardian of the Mountain of Purification, who greeted all souls who came there from our earth, and admitted them to its precincts. Cato told Dante and Virgil that from where they stood they could not begin the ascent, and directed them to go to the seashore, for the mountain rose from the centre of a little island. Near the shore, he told them, Virgil was to gather a smooth bulrush and gird Dante with it, and to wash his face from the stains of tears and smoke which he had acquired during his late journey. After this, Cato said, the sun which was just rising



would show them where to begin their ascent at the easiest point.

Thus admonished, our travellers turned their steps along the solitary plain, in the direction where, in the early morning light, they from afar perceived the trembling of the sea. I think Dante must have felt when he turned his tear-stained face to Virgil to be bathed in the morning dew that it was fitting that all stains of earth should be removed before he came before the angelic ministers who guarded the Purifying Mountain; and as he submitted to be girded by his guide with the smooth green rush gathered from the water-side, which had bent so meekly under the beating waves, he learnt that we must by humility and submission prepare ourselves for the steep climb and the various pains by which our Father leads us to Himself.

While Virgil and Dante were still lingering on the shore, they suddenly perceived a light moving towards them over the sea, more swiftly than the flight of any bird, and soon they recognised the light to be the figure of an angel standing upright in the hinder part of a boat, and guiding it without other oar or sail than his own white wings. Nearer and nearer came the celestial pilot, and Virgil cried out to Dante, "Kneel, kneel; behold the angel of



"BEHOLD THE ANGEL OF GOD!"



God; fold thy hands; henceforth thou shalt see no officers but such as this."

When the vessel and its heavenly guide reached the shore, Dante's eyes could not bear the bright light which shone from the angel; within the boat were seated more than a hundred spirits, who were all singing as with one voice the psalm, *When Israel came out of Egypt*, thus reminding themselves of the Jews being delivered from the house of bondage and setting out on their journey to the Promised Land, as these spirits were beginning a journey with a still more blessed goal before them.

When the boat touched the shore, the angel made the sign of the Holy Cross upon the pilgrims; then they sprang to land, and he departed as swiftly as he came. The crowd of new-comers, who were left standing upon the shore, looked about them to learn something of their surroundings, and perceiving Virgil and Dante, they turned to them and said, "If you know it, will you show us the way to go toward the mountain?" But Virgil replied, "You think perhaps that we are familiar with this place, but we are strangers like yourselves."

And now the spirits, looking more closely at the two poets, were astonished to perceive that Dante was still breathing, for, as you know, he was making this

journey in his human body, as his mortal life was not yet over, and he was shortly to return to earth again ; but all the other pilgrims, including Virgil, had left their bodies on earth, and though they looked like men and women still, and spoke and walked as when on earth, and were able to feel hunger, weariness, and pain, as we shall see further on, yet they had no bodies of flesh and blood which could be touched, or throw a shadow on the ground, as Dante's could.

All the spirits crowded round the traveller in astonishment at seeing him still in bodily form, and one of them made as though he would have embraced Dante with so much affection that he sprang forward to return the salute, but in vain. Dante's arms, which strove to enfold the stranger, seemed to pass through air ; there was no warm flesh and blood to return his embrace, as he had expected ! His look of astonishment made the shadow smile and draw himself back, and as soon as he had spoken, Dante recognised him as a friend whom he had known in Florence, an excellent musician, named Casella, whose singing had been wont to give him great delight in former days. Then Dante prayed him, if the new stage of life on which he had entered had not robbed him of memory and the power of singing, to refresh him with one of the songs which

had formerly ministered so much consolation to him. Casella then began to sing, most sweetly, a song of which Dante had written the words, and all the party, including Virgil, were quite absorbed in listening to the melody, when lo! the voice of Cato broke into the music, crying, "What is this, lazy spirits? What negligence, what dallying, is this?"

Thus interrupted, and urged by the old man to hasten to the mountain to begin their purifying pain, which was to make them ready to see God, the crowd of new-comers instantly set out running towards the hill, just as a flock of pigeons, disturbed at feeding time, leave their food suddenly and swiftly fly off. Virgil and Dante followed them no less quickly. The sun was now shining behind them, and Dante was alarmed by seeing only his own shadow on the ground before him, and turned to one side, fearful of having been deserted by his guide; but Virgil explained to him that in this stage of existence bodies cast no shadows, not being made of flesh and blood, as Dante's still was.

Thus talking, they had arrived at the foot of the mountain.

Do you not think this a very beautiful part of Dante's dream? The high mountain rising from the sea, the sun just beginning to shine forth, and the blue

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waves shimmering in the light, and then the boat coming so swiftly over the waters, and Dante's first sight of the heavenly family of angels, of whom he is to see so many in the course of his vision. Then the glad chanting of the spirits, rejoicing in being set free from the bondage of this world, and looking forward to their ascent of the hill of the Lord.

The meeting, too, between Dante and his friend the musician, and the gladness of both in the encounter, reminds us that in the other world we shall have the same joy in love and friendship as we have here; and the enjoyment of the beautiful singing and poetry shows that Dante, at least, imagined that our tastes and pursuits will be of the same kind there as here, though, of course, purified and ennobled.



## CHAPTER VI.

### OUTSIDE THE GATE.

“ We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”—ROMANS viii. 23.

“ What boots it, brother, to ascend,  
Since there God’s angel, sitting at the gate,  
Would not permit me to my pain to wend ? ”

PURGATORIO iv. 27-29.

IN the last chapter we saw the seashore, where the spirits arrived who had left the earth and entered upon the other life. From the landing-place, as we have seen, they hastened to the foot of the mountain to begin the ascent, and Dante in his dream seemed to follow them, with Virgil, to the same spot.

And here I must try to explain to you something of the plan of this new country through which Dante was now to travel. The upper part of the mountain rose like a cone, or sugar-loaf, getting narrower nearer the top, with seven ledges or roads running round it, at even distances one from the other, and a steep flight of steps leading from each ledge to the one above. On these seven ledges Dante was



to see men and women being purified from seven different kinds of sin, and made more ready to see God, as they went on from ledge to ledge. There was a door immediately below the first circle, through which every soul had to pass before it could begin its purifying pain. Below this door was a road running round the mountain, and on this lower part of the hill the spirits had to wait till they were allowed to enter the lowest circle. If, when on earth, they had delayed their repentance and thoughts of God till the end of their lives, now in this other world they had to wait before they might begin the ascent which was to lead them at last to the peace of heaven.

The poets, on arriving at the foot of the hill, found the rocks were so steep and precipitous that it would have been vain to attempt the climb from that point. While they were looking about for some easier path, they perceived a crowd of souls moving slowly towards them. Virgil and Dante went to meet them, and asked of them the way, and when the spirits had recovered from their surprise, that Dante was still living in his human body, they directed the travellers to turn back and go on in front of them till they came to the opening. One man among the number, fair and

beautiful and gentle looking, revealed himself to Dante as being Manfred, king of one part of Italy, who had been killed in battle thirty-four years before. Just before his death, he said he had turned weeping to Him who willingly pardons. "My sins," said he, "had been horrible, but Infinite Compassion has such wide arms that it receives all who turn to it."

While Manfred was talking to Dante, the two poets were still going along the road together with the crowd of souls, and soon they came to a place where their companions all cried out together, "Here is what you are seeking." Then they knew they must begin their climb, and here they were first brought face to face with the real difficulties of their enterprise.

Through a narrow gap in the side of the rock up went Virgil, and Dante after him ; so narrow was the path that they brushed against the rock on each side, and so steep that they were fain to use hands as well as feet in climbing upwards. Here is "Hill Difficulty" indeed ! Dante tells us that no ordinary climbing could help him here ; he had to mount on the swift wings of his great desire, following his leader, who gave him hope and light.

When they had crept to the top of this narrow path through the rock, and emerged upon the open

side of the hill, Dante said, "My master, which way shall we take?" Virgil replied that they must not go to the right hand or to the left, but keep straight on, up the mountain, until some trustworthy guide should appear. Poor Dante could not see to the top of the hill, and the ascent looked exceedingly steep; at last, wearied out, he began: "Oh, sweet father, look back and see that I shall be left alone if thou stay not;" but Virgil encouraged him by pointing out to him a little above them a ledge of rock which ran all round the mountain. Thus spurred on, Dante made a great effort, and, creeping on hands and knees, succeeded in dragging himself up to the ledge beside his master, and here they both sat to rest awhile and look back over the way by which they had come.

Dante now ventured to ask his guide how much farther they had to go, for the top of the hill was still out of sight. Virgil told him, for his comfort, that on this mountain the worst of the climbing was always at the beginning; the higher one got, the easier it became, so that when his progress should become as easy to him as floating down stream in a boat, then he would know that he was near the end of his journey, where his weariness might hope for repose. When Virgil had finished speaking, a voice near them

was heard saying, "Perhaps you will find it necessary to sit down before then."

At these words both the travellers turned round, and saw on their right hand a large stone which they had not before noticed; they drew near to it and found people reclining somewhat lazily in the shade of the rock, and one of them, who appeared weary, was sitting with his arms round his knees, and holding his face low down between them. This man Dante soon recognised to be Balacqua, a maker of musical instruments, whom he had known on earth, and who was well known to be of a most lazy disposition. Dante wondered to see him seated quietly here, and asked him if he was awaiting a guide, or if he was merely giving way to his old lazy habits? Balacqua explained to him that it was of no use for him to go on then, for the angel who guarded the door above them would not allow him to enter until he had waited outside the gates as long a time as his earthly life had lasted. He was one of those who, through laziness only, had deferred their repentance to the end of their life.

Virgil now called Dante to pursue his journey, as it was already mid-day and the sun was high in the heavens; so they went on along the ledge of rock. Dante was at first somewhat disturbed by the

pointing and whispering of the people behind them, when they perceived that his body, unlike theirs, cast a shadow on the ground as he went along, but Virgil rebuked him for looking back and lingering, and Dante, blushing and ashamed, pursued his way in silence.

They now came in sight of another crowd of souls, who in their turn were startled by seeing Dante's shadow, and speedily despatched two of their number to inquire into what was to their eyes so strange an appearance. Virgil sent back for answer that his companion still possessed his human body, and that if they greeted him with honour he might be of service to them—meaning that he might speak of them when he returned to earth. Instantly on receiving this answer, the spirits set off running at full speed towards the travellers, and, crowding round Dante, entreated him to stop and see if he recognised any of them from having known them on earth, and could carry back news of them to their friends. But Virgil had instructed Dante not to delay, but to listen to them as he went on his way. They told him that they had all died violent deaths, and had been sinners until their last hour, but that God, in His mercy, had pardoned them all, and now they said their hearts were sad with the longing they had to behold their



THE SPIRITS THROG ROUND DANTE.





Father's face. Some of them told their sad stories to Dante, and entreated him to speak of them to their friends on earth. Dante meantime was pursuing his road, surrounded by these spirits, some in front, some behind, and many on each side of him ; and by turning first to this one, and then to the other, and promising to comply with their requests, he at length freed himself from the throng.

Dante now fell into conversation with his guide, questioning him about some of the things which he found hard to understand in this strange, new world. Virgil told him that by-and-by all his difficulties would be explained by her who would be a light between his mind and the truth. He meant by this Beatrice, whom Dante would "see above, smiling and happy, on the summit of the mountain."

The mention of Beatrice urged Dante to greater haste. "Already," he said, "I am not so weary as I was." Virgil replied that while daylight lasted they would go as far as they could, but that the journey would be longer, perhaps, than Dante imagined.

The travellers are still, as you know, in the part of the mountain outside the Gate, and the spirits they have as yet seen in the dream have not begun to undergo the discipline which they need. Do you not think that there is a lesson for us in the thought



which Dante expresses of those souls longing and desiring to be allowed to come near to God, even though it be through pain that they must pass before they can see His face? The two ideas I want to bring home to you again and again, through our readings from Dante, are :

First, that sin and wrong-doing must inevitably bring its own punishment ; and,

Secondly, that pain is sent to us by our Father *in love*, to bring us nearer to Him.

The first lesson, if truly learnt, will help to keep us from sin, and the second will make us glad to suffer if we may in that way come closer to God.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE THREE STEPS.

"He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."—Ps. xci. 11.

"O'er the three steps my Guide then led me on  
With all good will, and said, 'Now, humbly pray  
That bolts and bars to us be open thrown.'"

PURGATORIO ix. 106-108.

DANTE still seemed to himself to be ascending the mountain with Virgil, on their way to the Gate which admits to the circles, and by-and-by he saw in his dream a shade standing quite alone, with his eyes fixed upon them. He said no word to them, but let them go by, haughty and disdainful as a lion at rest. Virgil approached him, and asked him to show them the easiest ascent. The stranger did not answer the request, but in his turn questioned them of their native country, and of their life. Virgil was beginning to speak of Mantua, the city of Italy where he was born, and as soon as he said the name the other sprang forward, saying, "Oh, Mantuan, I am Sordello, of thy city." Then the two embraced one another.

This Sordello, who had lived shortly before

Dante, and, like our traveller, had evidently dearly loved his native city, was delighted in the new country to meet with a fellow-citizen; but what was his further joy and amazement when he discovered that the Mantuan before him was no other than the famous poet Virgil, whose works Sordello had loved and studied like Dante himself, and whose name had conferred so much honour on the city from which they both sprang. Sordello embraced Virgil's knees with great reverence, and after some conversation together, the elder poet inquired of him if he could show them the shortest way to the Gate. Sordello told them that he was free to come and go in this lower part of the mountain, and that he would gladly serve as their guide as far as he might go, but he added that as the day was declining, and no farther ascent was possible during the night, it was well to think of some good resting-place for the hours of darkness. Virgil was surprised to find that they could not pursue their journey at night, and inquired what would prevent them. Sordello replied that the darkness would only prevent them from making an upward step, and that they might go down or round the mountain as much as they liked. He offered to take them to a spot not far distant where they might pass the

night, and be interested in seeing a number of spirits who were, like the others, awaiting their time for admission.

Sordello then led the way into a little valley in the side of the mountain. This valley was bright with coloured flowers, and with grass as green as emeralds; and a thousand sweet scents perfumed the air. On the grass among the flowers were seated spirits, engaged in singing their evening hymn. Our travellers stopped on a little path somewhat above the valley, and Sordello pointed out to his companions many of the spirits before them. These were they who, while in this life, had been so much occupied with earthly greatness and interests as to defer to the end their thought of God. Many of these were kings, princes, and nobles, who had been famous in their time. Among others, Sordello pointed out to them our own Henry III. of England, whose barons, you will remember, rebelled against him under Simon de Montfort.

Night was now rapidly approaching, and Dante saw one of the spirits rise to his feet, and seem by his gesture to require the attention of the rest. He folded and raised his hands, and fixed his eyes upon the eastern sky, as if saying to God, "I care for naught else." Then he began the last hymn of the evening

service, most devoutly and sweetly, the other spirits singing with him, their eyes also fixed upon the heavens. The hymn being ended, Dante beheld this noble company still silently looking upwards, as if in expectation, humble and fearful. And from on high descended two angels with flaming swords, blunted at the points. They were clothed in raiment green as the tender leaves of spring, and their robes fluttered behind them through the waving of their green wings. These angels stationed themselves one on either side of the valley, with the spirits between them. Dante could see their golden hair, but the brightness of their faces was too dazzling for him to look at them.

Sordello now told our poet that these angels had come from Paradise to guard the valley from the serpent that would shortly appear. At these words, Dante, all shivering with fear, drew close to the side of his trusted guide. Sordello now proposed that they should go down among the spirits and speak to some of them, and Dante immediately recognised one to be Nino Visconti, an old comrade in arms, and after friendly greetings between them, the other inquired of Dante how long it was since he had arrived at the foot of the mountain. Dante replied that it was only on the morning of that same day, and added that he was still in his mortal life, though by the



HELP IN TIME OF NEED.





journey he was making he [hoped to attain the life immortal. On hearing this, Nino drew back astonished, and called to one of his companions, seated near them, "Up, Currado! come and see what God of His mercy has willed." He further begged Dante to speak of him to his daughter on earth.

And now Sordello drew Virgil to him, saying, "Behold there our adversary!" and pointed with his finger to a snake, which Dante thought must have been like the one that tempted Eve in Paradise. Over the flowers and grass came the evil thing, from time to time turning its head and licking its back. The descent of the angels towards it was too swift for Dante to see them, but on hearing the rushing sound of their wings through the air, the serpent fled, and the angels forthwith returned to their posts.

The two poets, together with Sordello, Nino, and his friend Currado, were all seated together on the grass. Dante, overcome by weariness, fell asleep, and towards morning dreamt that he saw an eagle with feathers of gold in the air above him. Its wings were spread as if to swoop downwards, and after having revolved in the air for awhile, terrible as the lightning, it descended, caught up Dante in its claws, and carried him upwards. Then it seemed to Dante in his dream



that both he and the eagle were all in flames ; and so great was the heat of the imaginary fire that he awoke. Pale with fear, he looked around him, and found only Virgil his comforter beside him. It was two hours after sunrise, and his face was turned towards the sea. His master bade him have no fear, for he had now arrived at the Gate. He said, further, that at early dawn, while Dante was sleeping among the flowers in the little valley, a lady had come to them and offered to take Dante up the rest of the way, and thus make his road easy. Sordello and the others had remained below. The lady took up Dante, and Virgil followed, while the day was brightening. She brought Dante to the place where they now were, and departed, after her beautiful eyes had shown to Virgil the open entrance. Then Dante had awoke.

This explanation quite reassured the pilgrim, especially when he found that the heavenly visitant's name was Lucia, and that she was no other than the blessed lady whom we called Illuminating Grace, who had first aroused Beatrice to a sense of her friend's danger. Virgil, seeing his disciple to be now quite free from anxiety, took his way towards the opening in the rock, which Lucia had pointed out to him. Dante, following him, soon beheld the door, to which

three steps of different colours led up, and also saw a porter, who, as yet, spoke no word. Coming nearer, Dante perceived that this guardian was seated on the threshold, with his feet on the topmost step. He was clad in sad-coloured raiment, like ashes or dry earth. His face shone with a brightness which dazzled Dante, and he held a naked sword in his hand, which so reflected the bright rays upon them that they could not raise their eyes to it. This heavenly minister called to them to tell him from where they stood what was their desire ; for, seeing them without an escort—that is, without the angel who was wont to accompany spirits to the Gate—he did not know if he might admit them ; but Virgil having informed him of the lady from heaven who had shown them the way to the door, the courteous porter bade them advance to the foot of the steps.

The lowest step was of white marble—so bright and polished that Dante saw his own face reflected in it. The second was of a dark bluish grey, rough and uneven, and cracked both lengthways and across. The third, which rose massively above the others, was of flaming porphyry, red as blood.

By these three steps Dante learned what frame of mind we must be in when we come to our Father and ask Him to purify us from sin. Our hearts must be

true and sincere, like the bright clear marble ; they must be broken and contrite, like the rough cracked stone ; they must be full of burning love, like the flaming red porphyry. Up these three steps, willing and desirous, Dante was drawn by his leader, who then bade him humbly ask the porter to admit him. Dante threw himself at his feet, beat his breast three times, and craved mercy and admittance. First the angel inscribed seven P's upon his forehead with the point of his sword. These letters signified the seven different kinds of sin, from which the souls within were being purified—the Italian word for sin being *Peccato*. From beneath his sad-coloured robe the angel now drew forth two keys, one of gold and the other of silver, both of which he turned in the lock, and then bade them enter, but to beware of looking back, lest they should be cast out altogether. The door rolled back upon its hinges with a loud grating noise, and immediately there came to Dante's ears a sweet sound as of voices and instruments uniting in the *Te Deum*, " We praise Thee, O God," the song by which the spirits gave thanks to God for every new soul added by His mercy to their number.

And now we have come to the point in Dante's vision when he has passed through the door of the

Place of Purification. One thing he had surely learned from what he had already seen—namely, the watchful care over us, by night and by day, of heavenly guardians. The golden-haired, radiant angels, with their green wings and robes, spoke to him of the love from on high which comes to strengthen us against temptation in answer to our prayers. We must “lift up our hearts,” we must “care for naught else,” and then we may be sure strength from above will come down swiftly and drive away all selfishness and temper and sloth, and whatever wrong feelings are seeking to enter our hearts, as the evil snake strove to enter that green and flowery valley.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HEAVY BURDENS.

“He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, and hath exalted the lowly and meek.”—St. Luke i. 51, 52.

“Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.”

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 4, 5.

“So, praying for themselves and us ‘God speed,’

Those souls went on their way beneath their weight.”

PURGATORIO xi. 25, 26.

AND now Dante in his dream has passed within the Gate, and is to have immediate vision of different kinds of sin, and of the punishments which follow upon them. As soon as he and Virgil were within the door it closed behind them with the same resounding noise as when it opened; but, mindful of the angel's warning, they did not look back, but immediately began the ascent of a narrow, stony, and winding path cut in the rock.

After perhaps an hour and a half of wearisome climbing, they came out upon a level road running round the mountain. This was the first of the seven ledges on which the different kinds of sin were punished. On the three lowest of these ledges were to be

found those who had sinned through want of love to others—the proud, who hoped to raise themselves through the abasement of their neighbours; the envious, who grudged others their good things; and the wrathful, whose anger had made others to suffer.

Dante was by this time weary, and both he and his master were uncertain of their way when they came out upon the lonely road. From the wall of rock which bounded it on one side to the edge of the precipice the road was about eighteen feet wide. Dante had not begun to move along the ledge before he perceived the wall to be of bright marble, adorned with sculptures very beautifully carved. They represented instances of humility, to bring out the contrast with the pride to which the dwellers on this circle had given way. First Dante saw the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary of Christ's birth. The angel who had come to earth with the message of peace which had been so long desired, appeared before him in a gracious attitude, and so true to life that Dante could scarcely believe he was not saying *Hail* to the humble maiden before him, and almost expected to hear her reply, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. Dante was quite absorbed in gazing on the sculptured scene, but Virgil bade him not to look only on one picture, so he turned to the next, which

represented the sacred Ark of the Israelites being conducted to Jerusalem, drawn by oxen. In front went people divided into seven choirs ; and again it was difficult for Dante to believe that they were not really singing, so lifelike did they appear. Before the Ark went the humble Psalmist, King David, leaping and dancing, and from a window in a great palace his wife, Michal, looked down on him in scorn.

The third instance of humility sculptured on the wall was not taken from the Bible, but was a story told of the Roman Emperor Trajan. As he was riding one day at the head of his army, a poor widow caught the bridle of his horse and prayed him for justice to avenge the death of her son who had been murdered. The Emperor replied, "Wait, now, until I return." And she, who was made impatient by her grief, said, "Sire, if you do not return?" meaning, of course, that he might lose his life in battle. Then the Emperor told her that in that case his successor would avenge her wrong. But the poor woman rejoined, "Of what avail will the right-doing of another be to you, if you forget your own duty?" Upon this he stayed his army, and saw justice done to her before going on his way. The great Emperor, you see, was not too proud to accept the rebuke of the poor widow.

All this story Dante saw most vividly depicted in

the marble—the crowd of mounted officers, the woman with her sad, tear-stained face, and even the waving of the golden eagles, the imperial standard, above the Emperor's head.

Dante was delighting himself with the sight of these wonderful, lifelike sculptures, which he felt only God Himself could have carved on the walls, so far superior were they to any he had seen on earth, when Virgil called his attention to a number of people who were coming slowly towards them, and who might, he thought, be able to show them the way to the higher circles.

And now Dante is to have his first sight of the suffering which comes from wrong-doing. You remember that all the spirits on this circle had sinned when on earth from pride, want of love to others, desire to raise themselves while others were abased, forgetting how our Lord taught us to take the lowest place, and to give way to others. On earth these men carried their heads high, and now how do they come? Creeping along with great stones on their backs, so bent down to earth by the weight that their chests seem to touch their knees! What a pitiful procession! They reminded Dante of those grotesque figures which you may have seen sometimes high up in the corner under the roof of an old church, which seem



bent double by the heavy weight that is above them.

Dante observed that these spirits were not all equally weighed down : the stones carried by some were larger and heavier than those borne by others, according as the sin had been greater or less in this world. Thus weary and heavy laden, these suffering souls passed on along the circle, repeating the prayer—which our Lord Himself has given us—to their Father in heaven, that His name might be hallowed, that the peace of His kingdom might come to them, for by their own power they could not hope to attain to it—that as His angels in heaven sacrifice their wills to His, singing Hosanna, so might men also gladly do His will—that He would give them day by day their daily bread, without which they could not continue their journey along the rugged desert. They prayed also that He would forgive them their trespasses, as they forgave to others their offences against them ; but the last petition, that they might not fall into temptation but be delivered from evil, was not offered for themselves who no longer needed it, inasmuch as they were no longer tempted, nor could fall into sin, but for those who were still on earth, and exposed to temptation. Dante was greatly touched by finding that these souls, patiently enduring their merited

punishment, were constantly interceding for those they had left behind them, that they might be kept from temptation and sin.

Virgil ventured to ask these spirits to direct him and his companion to the shortest and easiest road to the steps leading up to the next circle, explaining that Dante was still burdened with his mortal body, which made the climbing more difficult for him. A voice replied to this request from under one of the stones, directing them to go along with the speaker till they came to a path which it was possible for a living man to ascend. This voice was that of *Omberto*, a Tuscan, who had lived in the same part of the country as Dante did. He was of a noble family, and so proud and arrogant on account of the famous deeds which his ancestors had performed, and so contemptuous of others, forgetting that all men are alike in God's sight, that he made himself unbearable to his countrymen, who had him put to death; and further, as he told Dante, pride had brought all his relations into trouble.

To hear this story Dante had been obliged to go along stooping his head down to bring it on a level with *Omberto's*, and now another of the burdened spirits, turning his head with difficulty under his load, saw Dante and recognised him, and prayed him to go

along with them, all bent double as they were. This was Oderisi, who had been a famous miniature painter in Dante's time, and the poet, who as you will remember was very fond of painting, had known him in Italy. Oderisi had been very proud of his genius while on earth, but now, when Dante spoke to him of his superiority as a painter, he at once began to praise the pictures of a pupil of his who was still living, and who had learnt to paint more beautifully than his master. "I should have been less courteous," said Oderisi, "while I was alive, because of the great desire for excellence, on which my heart was set." He then went on to speak of earthly honour and fame—how short a time it lasts, and how quickly one man is forgotten and another becomes famous. As an instance of this he mentioned the spirit who was going on in front of him. He had been a citizen of Siena, another Italian city, and had been famous in his day throughout Tuscany, but now, thirty-one years only after his death, he was almost entirely forgotten. This man was very brave in war, but ambitious of power, and had tried to make himself sole governor of his native city ; for this ambition he was now suffering the penalty of creeping along under his heavy load.

Thus Dante was shown instances of three different

kinds of pride, which all bring their own penalty. The first, Omberto, was arrogant on account of his family and noble station ; the second, Oderisi, was vain of his gifts and genius ; the third was presumptuous, and sought for power which his fellow-citizens did not desire to allow him.

Thoughtful and attentive to Oderisi's words, Dante was still going along the road bent downwards, so that he and the painter were like two oxen in a yoke, when Virgil called to him to straighten himself and pursue his way more briskly ; and as they went along the road at a good pace, Dante turned his eyes downwards, and saw that the ground under their feet was covered with carvings, representing scenes in which pride was being punished, some taken from the Bible and others from the Greek stories of gods and heroes. Here Dante saw Satan as lightning falling from heaven, and Nimrod standing all confounded at the foot of the Tower of Babel, which in his pride he had sought to raise to heaven, in consequence of which he and his companions were punished by having their language confused, that they might not understand one another's speech. He saw King Saul killed on Mount Gilboa, and King Rehoboam fleeing away on his chariot to Jerusalem, after his proud tyranny and threatenings had made

the people of Israel rebel against him. He saw Sennacherib, the proud King of Assyria, killed by the swords of his own sons while he was worshipping in his temple, and also the flight of the Assyrians later in the history after their leader Holofernes had been killed by Judith. Other stories he saw from the heathen mythology which taught the same lesson.

While Dante was thus going along the road with eyes fixed on the sculptured pavement at his feet, Virgil, who was in front of him, cried to him to lift his head, for there was no longer time to examine the carvings. An angel was on his way towards them, and Dante was to greet him with reverence, in hope that he would further their upward journey. This beautiful angel was clad in white robes, and his face was as the trembling of the morning star. He opened his arms and his wings, saying, "Come, for the steps are near, and the ascent is now easy." He led the travellers to an opening in the rock, beat with his wing on Dante's forehead, and then gave them permission to mount.

As they turned to the stair, they heard behind them sweet voices singing, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*—for it was fitting that those who had sinned from pride should now rejoice in the blessedness of humility.

Dante has now had his first lesson in the sinfulness of sin and all that follows on it. He remembered in Florence many of his fellow-citizens among the politicians and rulers, as well as among the artists and scholars, who were proud of their powers and gifts, and held themselves to be very superior to their fellows. Now, in his dream of the unseen world, he saw them crushed and humbled beneath their heavy load, toiling in pain and weariness along the road ; and do you not think that by this sad sight he was taught that those who are proud or vain or self-satisfied are already in this life carrying a heavy burden in their isolation and their effort to appear superior to their fellows ?

The burden of *Self*, of our own position, our own gifts, our own importance, is at times very heavy to bear ; it is only when we forget self, and desire praise and admiration more for others than for ourselves, and learn willingly to take a lowly place, that we find the heavy burden is gone ; our journey becomes easier at once, and we ourselves are free and strong to follow our Lord Himself, and to bear the burdens of others

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CLOSED EYES.

"Love envieth not; . . . seeketh not her own."—I CORINTHIANS xiii. 4, 5.

"As the blind the sun's ray vainly seek,  
So to the souls of whom I spake but now  
The light of heaven shows but a glimmering streak."

PURGATORIO xiii. 67-69.

AND now Dante is mounting the stairs which lead from the first terrace, where he has seen the punishment which comes on the proud, to the second terrace, where he is to see the envious, who have also broken the law of love, and instead of rejoicing in the happiness and advantages of others, have been selfish, and so desired good for themselves that it has given them pain to see their neighbours in any way more favoured than they.

And it seemed to Dante in his dream that this fresh climb was much easier to him even than going along the level road had been, and he turned to Virgil to ask him what heavy weight had been removed from him, so that the ascent no longer made him feel weary. Virgil replied that the angel had, with his wing,

brushed from his forehead the first of the seven P's, which, as you know, were signs of the seven kinds of sin. They had passed through the circle where souls were being purged from pride, and this being the root of all other sins, by its removal the other P's had become much fainter. And Virgil added that when they also had been entirely erased, not only would his feet not be weary, but the upward-going would be a delight to him. Dante had not, till this moment, known what the angel had done to him, but passing his fingers over his forehead, he felt only six P's instead of seven. All souls had to be purified from pride before they could ascend to the second circle.

When the two pilgrims had arrived at the top of the flight of steps, they found themselves on a ledge running all round the mountain just like the road below; but here there were no carvings on the inner wall, or on the road under their feet; both walls and road were of the same livid-coloured stone. No spirits were to be seen, and Virgil felt that if they waited for someone to give them directions it might delay them too long; so they decided to turn to the right and go along the road that way. Before long they heard voices in the air above them, as if invisible angels were flying past



them; and these voices seemed to be quoting instances of love, which was the opposite virtue to the sin of envy, to which the dwellers on this circle had given way. The first voice they heard was saying, *They have no wine*, and went by them swiftly, repeating the same words until quite out of hearing. You will, of course, remember that these words were said by the Virgin Mary at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, when in her love she hoped her Blessed Son would work a miracle for the marriage party. The second voice was crying, "I am Orestes," reminding the hearers of a beautiful instance of self-sacrificing love and friendship. Orestes and Pylades were two devoted friends. Orestes had been condemned to death by the king, Egisthus, who did not, however, know him by sight. When the day named for the execution arrived, Orestes was absent from the city, and his friend, Pylades, presented himself to the king, saying that he was Orestes, hoping by this that he should save his friend and suffer death in his stead.

The third voice was repeating our Lord's words from the Sermon on the Mount, *Love your enemies*. By these three voices Dante was reminded of three different kinds of love. By the first, of the love which gives aid to those who need it, as Mary thought of the



DANTE MOVED WITH COMPASSION.



need of the wedding party ; by the second, of the love which will sacrifice itself, even to death, to save another ; by the third, of the love which returns good for evil.

Virgil now called Dante's attention to people seated on the ground, leaning one against the other, and all with their backs against the wall of rock. These figures were clothed in cloaks of coarse sack-cloth, in colour like the wall against which they were leaning. These were they who, while on earth, had looked with envious eyes on the happiness and good of others ; now their eyes are closed, for these poor souls are all blind, and down their cheeks flow floods of salt tears. On earth they did not love and help one another, but were glad to see others cast down and in misfortune ; now each supports his suffering neighbour by the help of his shoulder. Dante was deeply touched by the sad spectacle of these helpless spirits, who in their darkness and pain were uttering prayers aloud ; and he felt it to be almost an insult to them to be able to see them while they were unconscious of his presence. So turning to them he inquired of them if any among them were Italian ; whereupon one replied, "O brother mine, each one of us is a citizen of a true city, but thou demandest if anyone lived in Italy as a pilgrim."

The spirit who thus made answer had been a Sienese lady, and she further told Dante that she so hated her fellow-citizens while on earth that, seeing them defeated in battle, she had rejoiced more in their misfortune than she would have done over her own good fortune. She inquired of Dante, with surprise, how it was that he was passing along by them, still breathing, as she could hear by his speech, and with his eyes free? He told her that the time would come for him, too, to lose his eyesight in that circle, but not, he said, would he be blind for long, seeing that he had not often given way to envy while on earth. The punishment that he had seen below of the proud and haughty had weighed upon his mind much more, for his conscience told him that pride had been his great temptation in life. The Sienese lady felt that his being allowed to see the other world in his mortal body was indeed a great sign of God's love to him; and two others of the spirits, who had overheard the conversation, and were likewise amazed at the grace given to him, questioned him of his country and name. These two were both fellow-countrymen of Dante, and after some talk with them about the state of Italy, our two poets went on their way. The blind and suffering souls heard their departing steps and did not call after them; and by their silence

Virgil and Dante were assured that they were going in the right direction.

How many thoughts are suggested to us by this part of the dream? Is it not true that those who are envious of others, who grudge them their happiness and enjoyment, really do become blind, for the power to look rightly on the things around them gradually slips from them through their envy and selfishness. You know that one kind of blindness which is called cataract is caused by a film gradually forming over the eye, and the sight becomes dimmer and dimmer, and at last fails altogether. So with spiritual things; when we look at others with love and sympathy, our sight is clear and penetrating, and we rejoice more that they should be happy even than that we should be happy ourselves, but if self is uppermost, and we want good and blessing most of all for ourselves, then gradually a thick film of selfishness forms between us and them, our power of vision is clouded, and we become blind!

A short time after the poets had left the group of spirits a flash of lightning was seen in the sky, and a voice was heard in the air above them crying, *Whosoever findeth me shall slay me*, and this voice went by them as the others had done. These words were spoken by Cain who slew his brother through

envy of him, and who was therefore driven out by God to be a fugitive and wanderer in the earth. Then the travellers heard another sound as of the crash of thunder, and a voice, "I am Aglauros, who was changed into stone." This was one of the Greek fables, of a maiden, Aglauros, who was envious of her sister, and in punishment of her envy was changed into stone.

These voices were to show Dante instances of envy and want of love bringing its own punishment.

It was now towards evening, and they were going towards the west, so that the sun was shining full in their faces, when Dante became aware of a much brighter light, which dazzled him so much that he was obliged to cover his eyes with his hand, and even then the light was reflected upon him from the ground, so that he was fain to ask his leader what was the cause of all this brightness.

Virgil told him that this was a messenger sent from heaven to show them where they might ascend, and that he must not wonder if he was still dazzled by the brightness of the angels, though before long, when he was entirely purified from sin, such heavenly light would no longer oppress him, but would give him only pure delight.

When they had reached him, the blessed angel

with a glad voice said to them, "Enter here, upon a stair far less steep than the others." And as they mounted they heard behind them the words chanted, *Blessed are the merciful*, and "Rejoice, thou that overcomest."



## CHAPTER X.

### THE BLINDING SMOKE.

"Love suffereth long, and is kind ; love is not easily provoked."—  
I CORINTHIANS xiii. 4, 5.

"He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."—I ST. JOHN ii. 11.

"Voices I heard, and each most piteously  
Appeared for mercy and for peace to pray  
The Lamb of God, who all our sins puts by."

PURGATORIO xvi. 16-18.

DANTE has now in his dream seen two of the forms in which want of love to others manifests itself, and the way in which these sins bring their own punishment. He is now to see the purifying pain which is endured by those who give way to anger and passion, and I think you will see at once how great a truth is taught on this circle.

Before he comes actually in sight of the sinners he is given, as in a vision, instances of meekness and gentleness, the opposite virtue to the sin of anger and passion.

First, he saw the Temple of Jerusalem, with many persons seated in it, and at the entrance a woman,

who with sweet motherly gentleness was saying: *Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.* I need not tell you that this was Mary returned to Jerusalem to seek the child Jesus, who had tarried behind in the Temple with the doctors.

Dante also saw in his dream a number of people full of wrath, stoning a young man, and crying, "Slay him! slay him!" and he, kneeling down, lifted up his eyes to heaven, praying, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.* This was the first martyr, St. Stephen, who, instead of resenting the cruelty of his murderers, only prayed meekly that God would forgive them their sin.

After another instance of forgiveness and mildness towards others, Dante's vision came to an end, but on first returning to the consciousness of what was around them he was confused, and his feet tottered under him like those of a man who has been suddenly roused from sleep. Virgil asked him what ailed him, that he could not walk steadily. Dante would have recounted the vision to his leader, but Virgil was already aware of what had appeared to him, and told him that these scenes were to teach him the blessedness of a peaceful and forgiving spirit; he said he had only inquired what ailed him to rouse

him and encourage him to walk briskly once more.

So on they went towards the sweet shining of the western sun, when little by little they become enveloped in a dense cloud of black smoke, in a darkness as of midnight when the sky is covered with clouds and no moon or stars appear. Dante found it impossible to keep his eyes open in this choking, blinding atmosphere, but Virgil came close to him and bade him lean on his shoulder, and thus, like a blind man led by his guide, Dante went on through the smoke, Virgil bidding him beware of separating himself from his leader. Through the darkness he heard voices in prayer, saying, "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace. Have mercy upon us." Every prayer was thus addressed to our Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, because the gentleness and meekness of a lamb are so different from the anger and passion to which these spirits had given way on earth. All their prayers were said together, and in the same words, to show the harmony and friendliness which now reigned among them.

Dante having asked a question of his master, a voice was heard inquiring who he was, going through the smoke, and speaking as if still in mortal body. Virgil bade Dante reply, and himself inquired of the



CLOUDS AND THICK DARKNESS.



spirit the way to the ascent; and the unseen shade was glad to go along with them as far as he might through the smoke, talking of Italy, of which Dante was always willing to converse; but when they arrived at the spot where light began to show through the darkness the spirit said he must go no farther, for he might not yet appear before the angel who would receive them when they had passed through the smoke.

This, then, is the consequence of being angry and wrathful! The spirits are obliged to walk and live in thick, black smoke, blinding and choking them with its close fumes. Dante must have remembered the many quarrels and fierce disputes, the anger and passion, which he had seen among his fellow-countrymen in former days, and have felt how fitting it was that those who had allowed themselves to be blinded and choked by their passions should thus be cut off for a time from the bright sunshine and sweet, serene air, to learn how darkening and irritating to our true selves is the cloud of wrath into which we at times allow ourselves to enter. How true it is that bad temper and anger do take from us all power of seeing things rightly! Do not all forms of irritability, or sulkiness even, seem to wrap us up in a black cloud? And it is only when we

call for help from above that light shines through the darkness, and we are able to shake off the oppressive and irritating smoke which so blinded us.

When they had emerged from the darkness they found that the sun was nearly setting; and now Dante seemed in his dream to have another vision; not this time of instances of love and gentleness, but of wrath and anger bringing their own punishment. Among others he saw the wrathful Haman, who, you will remember, was so angry with the good Jew, Mordecai, because he would not bow down before him or do him reverence, that he had a high gallows erected on which to have him hanged; but, as you know, it was Haman, and not Mordecai, who was hanged upon the gallows. This sad punishment Dante beheld in his dream; and round the gallows stood the great King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther and righteous Mordecai.

After some other dreams of the like nature, Dante was awaked by a bright light shining on his face. He turned to see where he was, when a voice was heard saying, "Here is the ascent."

Dante was most desirous to behold the speaker, but the bright light which shone from him dazzled him, and he could not see what he wished. Virgil told him that this radiant figure was an angel, who

had pointed out to them the steps before they had asked him, and Virgil urged his companion to greater haste, for night was near, and, as you know, on this mountain they could not climb at all during the hours of darkness. As Dante began the ascent, he felt a waving of wings and a breath of air on his forehead, which told him that the third P was erased, now that they had left the sin of anger behind them. The words, *Blessed are the peacemakers*, who are without sinful anger, could be heard from the circle they were leaving. Night was now around them, and the stars were beginning to shine by the time they arrived at the top of the flight of steps and came out again upon a level road. They could no longer move their feet, and were fain to remain where they were till the return of daylight. So they sat down and began to talk.

Dante listened awhile to hear if there were any sounds in this new circle, and, turning to Virgil, he asked, "Sweet father mine, what offence is being purged on this circle?" His master, seeing they could no longer proceed on their journey, took the opportunity of explaining to Dante in what way the different classes of sinners were divided. The three circles they had seen had all contained those who had sinned from want of love to others. The middle



circle of the seven, on which they had now arrived, contained those who had been lazy and indolent, and had been wanting in love to God. On the three circles above them they would find those who had loved their own ease and pleasure too much, the avaricious and greedy and self-indulgent.

Dante here learns anew a lesson which we have all been taught ever since we first began to learn about holy things, but which we need to remember all our life long—that *Love* is the great principle of the Christian life, and that all sin can be traced back to want of love to our neighbour or to God. All sins of pride or of envy or of temper are forms of selfishness and unlovingness, just as much as laziness and cowardice and discontent, or as the sins which Dante saw later on in his dream—excessive love of money, or of eating and drinking, or of personal enjoyment. If we loved our neighbour enough, we should not sin against him, either by pride or envy or passion ; if we loved God enough, we should not sin against Him by laziness, or by excessive self-love, making us greedy for money, or for personal pleasure.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WEARY RUNNERS.

“Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”  
ROMANS xii 11.

“Haste, haste ! that time may not be lost by you  
Through lack of love . . . . .  
That zeal in doing good may grace renew.”  
PURGATORIO xviii. 103-105.

AND now are you getting tired of Dante's journey, and impatient to get with him to the top of the mountain ? What a number of things he has seen and heard and thought about during the two days and nights we have travelled with him ! Words and sights which he will remember all his life long, and which he will spend much time in writing down for us to read in his long and beautiful poem.

Let us think over what we have seen with him. First, the high mountain rising from the sea, and the old man, with the beautiful white hair and beard, who first spoke to them—the bright stars shining overhead—and then the distant sea beginning to tremble

under the first rays of the morning sun. You remember how Dante's face was washed from the stains of sin and sorrow, and how he was girded with the smooth, green rush, and then the boat coming so quickly over the sea, guided by the bright angel, and the singing of the spirits who were sitting in the boat. Then Casella, the musician, who sang so sweetly to the new-comers that they forgot to hasten to the mountain to be made beautiful. Then you will remember what a number of people Dante saw on the lower part of the mountain, outside the Gate, and among them the Mantuan, Sordello, who was so pleased to meet with Virgil, and who took them to rest for the night in that little green valley full of sweet-scented flowers, and guarded by the two beautiful angels with green robes and wings; and the sweet lady from heaven, who carried Dante up the last part of the way, and set him down outside the entrance.

I am sure that as he waited through the night on the fourth circle, which he and his guide have now reached, he was thinking over all these many things. He remembered the steep and weary climb up the rocks after he had first passed through the door, and then he thought over the three circles he had seen—of those who had been proud on earth, creeping along under the weight of their heavy

burdens ; the envious, blind and unable to move, but each supporting his neighbour as best he could ; and then the passionate, choked and blinded by the thick, black smoke. But though these punishments were sad to see, and must have been hard to bear, yet Dante felt that there were very sweet and comforting thoughts about the mountain. Every circle was guarded by a bright angel from heaven ; sweet prayers and hymns were constantly going up to the Father of all ; there were sculptures, and visions, and voices, telling of those who had been humble, loving, and gentle on earth ; and in each circle they were wont to repeat some of our Lord's words spoken long ago on the mountain in Galilee, about the blessedness of *the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven ; of the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy ; of the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.* Dante's silent meditations were suddenly interrupted by the sound of many feet running behind them, and immediately they were overtaken by a great crowd of people hurrying at full speed along the road. The two foremost runners were crying out through tears, *Mary went into the hill-country with haste*, and "Cæsar, to conquer Lerida, hastened to Spain." Those behind were exclaiming, "Haste, haste ; let no time be lost through want of love."

Virgil seized the opportunity of asking these passers-by where they should find the opening leading to the next circle. One of the spirits replied that the travellers had better follow the crowd till they came to the flight of steps. The strong desire of movement which possessed these souls prevented them, he said, from stopping at all, and he begged Virgil not to take this for discourtesy. You will remember that on earth these spirits had sinned through laziness and unwillingness to move in God's service. Now they could not rest, but were fain to run continually. The last words that the spirit said to them were lost to their ears: he had already run so far beyond them. The two last members of the hurrying crowd now went by them, recounting instances of laziness being punished, such as the children of Israel in the wilderness, who were unwilling to suffer the fatigues and efforts of the march through the desert, and were punished by not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. When the last of the runners had quite disappeared, Dante fell asleep, and was not awakened by Virgil till the sun had risen, and they were again able to resume their journey.

They now went on along the road until they came to the angel who guarded this fourth circle "Come, for here is the opening," he said, in a sweet



HUNGER UNSATISFIED.



and gentle voice, such as we do not hear in this world. Then he waved upon them with his open wings, and they began the ascent of the flight of steps between the two hard walls of rock. As they mounted the stairs they heard the angel behind them speaking of the blessedness of *those that mourn*, for to them comfort is given, meaning how blessed it is to grieve for sins; for what great consolation comes after such penitence!

Perhaps some of you may think that the punishment inflicted on those who had been lazy and cowardly on earth was not so painful as the other sufferings Dante had seen; but what I think he learnt from these runners, who, you must remember, might not stop for a moment, however tired and exhausted they felt, was the lesson that sooner or later all must make efforts and exert themselves in God's service; and such exertions are most painful if we have lost the habit of activity, just as in the same way, if we do not use our arms and legs for a time, the muscles get stiff and weak, and it is painful to begin to walk or use our limbs. The life we are called to here on earth as Christians is an active life. St. Paul compares it to a race, and bids us *so run* that we may obtain the prize; and as all who are meaning to take part in a race, exercise



and practise themselves beforehand, in order that they may run swiftly and strongly, so we must daily exert ourselves in all Christian service, *running the race that is set before us*, so that we may at length attain our glorious goal.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BOWED DOWN TO THE EARTH.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”

I ST. JOHN ii. 15.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”—ST. MATTHEW vi. 19.

“E'en as our eye was never upwards sent,

But ever fixed upon the things of earth,

So justice here our forms to earth hath bent.”

PURGATORIO xix. 118-120.

THE next lesson that Dante would teach us through his dream is the vanity and sinfulness of having too much love for money, or for any earthly prosperity or possession.

On the fifth circle he seemed to see men lying face downwards on the ground, weeping and uttering the words, *My soul cleaveth unto the dust*, through such deep sighs that Dante could hardly distinguish what they said. Why is this punishment inflicted? you may ask. On earth these men had not lifted their eyes to heaven, nor sought to know how they could best serve and please God; they had only cared for the things of this life—how they might collect money and become rich. Now their

punishment is to lie thus, with their eyes to the ground, their hands and feet tied, and their backs turned to heaven; and there was no more bitter punishment in all the mountain, because those who had passed into the other world knew so well now the beauty of heaven and heavenly things that it was a sore trial not to be allowed as yet even to turn their eyes in that direction. Dante was desirous of addressing one of these prostrate figures, and having obtained permission from his master, he bent down over the figure, and prayed him to tell him who he was, and why his back was thus turned to heaven.

The spirit informed him that on earth he had cared too much for earthly splendour and riches, and that before his death he had been Pope of Rome—that is, he had had the highest position he could have held, for not only was the Pope the earthly head of the Roman Catholic Church, but he was also a mighty sovereign, and had very great dominions. In this high station he had learnt that no worldly greatness can bring peace and happiness, and had at last turned with love to God. As soon as Dante had heard the name of the spirit, he knelt down beside him to do him reverence as Pope, for all men paid great outward respect to the Pope at that time; but when the other found what he was doing, he said,

"For what reason are you thus bent downwards?" and when Dante told him it was in reverence to his dignity, the Pope bade him rise and remember that he was fellow-servant with Dante himself, and with all others, to one Potentate. By this he wished to teach him that in the other world there are no differences of station as there are in this.

After Virgil and Dante had left the Pope, they had to go on close beside the wall, because the rest of the road was so covered with the prostrate forms; and by-and-by Dante overheard one of the spirits speaking, and on paying closer attention he found that he was giving instances of virtues contrary to avarice and love of money. Among others he spoke of the humble poverty of Mary, who *brought forth her firstborn Son* in a stable, and *laid Him in a manger*. After listening for some time, Dante addressed the spirit who was thus speaking, and asked him why he only told stories of the poor, and self-denying, and generous; and the shade replied that it was their custom in that circle to spend their days in recording examples of the virtues contrary to the sins to which they had given way on earth, and during the night they told stories of those who had been punished for love of money. One of these stories was taken from the Greek fables, and referred to a king called Midas, who so loved

money that he prayed the gods to change everything he touched into gold. His request was granted, and then what misery came upon him ! for the food which he was going to put into his mouth changed to gold, and could no longer nourish him, and even, as I have read the story, his own little girl, when she ran to kiss him, became a little golden image, instead of a living, breathing, loving child. This punishment of Midas seems to me the worst thing that could happen to anyone for loving money too much.

This circle of the money-lovers is the first of the three classes of sinners who have thought too much of their own pleasure and of earthly enjoyment, and too little of God and of heavenly things. Do you not think that Dante must have deeply felt the suitability of the discipline he had seen to the sin of which these avaricious souls had been guilty ? Is it not true that those who give their attention only to the things that are around them do gradually lose the power of insight into unseen things ? With those who think only of the possessions they have to enjoy here, and who never look up in thankful remembrance to the Father who gives us all things, is it not as if, on a lovely country walk, we were to keep our eyes fixed on the ground beneath our feet, and never once look up to the green trees waving above our

heads, to the blue sky, with the sun shedding its bright beams upon us? We must strengthen our power of looking upward by constant and regular prayer, by reading and thought on holy things, and by making it a habit as far as possible to look at all earthly possessions in relation to our duty to God. If we do this, being rich and prosperous will not hurt us; we shall learn to look at these things as our Father's gifts, given to us as helps, not hindrances, to our true life.

Of course, collecting money, or even spending it wastefully, is not so much a temptation to us while we are still young, but other things—our lessons and amusements—our daily occupations and interests—are apt to absorb all our time and thoughts; and if we allow these or any other earthly cares to occupy us wholly, we shall, like these poor misers, be turning our backs on God and on heaven, and little by little our souls will cleave unto the dust, and the power of looking upwards will be lost to us altogether.

The next event of the poet's journey was a great surprise to Dante. Hitherto, in his dream, the mountain had seemed a very peaceful and quiet spot. It was open to the sweet rays of the sun, but there were no changes of weather—no snow or frost, no rain or wind—to disturb their upward journey. But now suddenly the ground began to tremble under their

feet, and the whole mountain shook as if from an earthquake! Imagine Dante's terror: he felt cold as ice; and at the same time as the tremblings, voices from every circle of the mountain began joyfully to sing the Christmas song, *Glory to God in the Highest!* The travellers remained motionless and attentive, like the shepherds who first heard that song, until the trembling ceased and the music was hushed. Then they resumed their way by the side of the misers, Dante burning with curiosity to know the meaning both of the trembling and of the song.

And it seemed to him in his dream that, just as Christ joined the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, so now a stranger came up behind himself and Virgil. They did not perceive him, however, till he said, "My brothers, may God give you peace;" then Virgil turned and responded to his greeting, and prayed the stranger to explain what had puzzled them. The spirit told them that the mountain trembled, and all the souls rejoiced and gave glory to God, when one of their number was purged from all his sins and became free to go on up to the Paradise of God. This blessed moment had arrived for him, he said, and hence the trembling and the glad hymn which they had just felt and heard.

The three now pursued their road in company,

and Virgil questioned the happy spirit about his name and condition when on earth. The other told him that his name was Statius, that he had been a Roman poet, who had died in the year 96—that is, not a hundred years after Virgil himself had lived. He said, further, little knowing to whom he was speaking, that the study of Virgil's poems had inspired him to write his own—that without such an example he would have written nothing that was worth reading, and ended by saying that he would have given up a great deal to have been alive at the same time as Virgil! At these words Dante's master turned to him with a look which bade him be silent and not betray his name to Statius; but Dante, though he said nothing, could not resist an involuntary smile as he thought what would be the surprise of Statius if he knew the truth. This smile betrayed him, for the new-comer eagerly questioned him as to the cause of his mirth. Dante sighed, and did not venture to reply, till Virgil bade him speak and satisfy the other's curiosity. Then Dante revealed to Statius that he was actually in presence of the great poet from whose works he had drawn the inspiration which had made him strong himself to sing of gods and men. Statius' love for Virgil, and his joy at thus encountering him, made him forget that they were



both but shadows, and he would fain have embraced the knees of his great teacher ; but Virgil bade him rise, reminding him that they were no longer on earth, where such tokens of respect are fitting.

This new-comer, Statius, who had thus joined the two friends, would now accompany them all the rest of their journey, for his time on the purifying mountain was at an end, and he was to pass, like Virgil and Dante, through the two remaining circles, and on to the Paradise of God. It was a great pleasure for Virgil and Statius to be together like this, and they went on, talking to one another, while Dante followed, listening to their conversation, and learning much, he tells us, from the words of two such wise poets. Virgil encouraged Statius to tell him all his story, and why he had been obliged to stay so long lying face downwards upon the ground among the avaricious.

The party had by this time left the circle of misers, Dante had lost the fifth P from his forehead, and they had heard, as usual on leaving the circles, the words of one of the Beatitudes chanted behind them ; this time they heard part of the fourth Beatitude—*Blessed are they that thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* I think the reason why these words were sung in the circle of the money-lovers

was to show the contrast between those who try to get all the money or good things they can for themselves, and those who desire righteousness or justice, by which each possesses only his fair share, which God bestows upon him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

“Temperate in all things.”—1 CORINTHIANS ix. 25.

“The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.”—Ps. cxlv. 15.

“This people all, that wail their misery  
Through yielding to ungoverned appetite,  
By thirst and hunger holier come to be.”

PURGATORIO xxiii. 64-66.

WE have now arrived at the point in Dante's vision where he is to see the purifying pain of those who have thought too much of their own enjoyment in eating and drinking ; but before the sixth circle is reached, Dante overhears a conversation between Virgil and Statius, in which Virgil inquires of the other how it was that, being so wise and thoughtful, he could have cared so much for money while on earth, that he had been punished among the misers ? At this question Statius smiled a little, and then told Virgil that he was mistaken in supposing he had been a miser while on earth. He had not hoarded money, he said, but had spent it too freely, and wasted it, and this

was the reason why he had been obliged to pass so long a time among the avaricious, because in that circle were found the souls of all those who had loved money too much in any way, either in keeping it or in spending it wastefully. Statius went on to say that it was some words which Virgil had himself written which had opened his eyes to the sin and folly of his own wasteful habits, and made him repent.

Virgil then asked him what had first led him to become a Christian, for at the time of his earlier writings he had still been a heathen. Statius replied that this also was from words of Virgil, speaking of a new time which was coming, and of One who would come down to earth from heaven. This had first led him to expect some change ; and when, soon after this, he came to know some Christians, and to see their holy lives, he too was baptised, and joined the blessed company of faithful people ; but at that time the Christians often had to suffer persecution, and many of them were martyred for their faith, and Statius was not brave enough to openly declare himself a Christian ; and for this cowardice he had been punished for a long time among the lazy and cowardly in the circle where the spirits were running so fast and were never allowed to rest.

Now, as you know, all the pain and punishment were over for him, and he was to go straight up to the peace and rest of heaven.

Thus talking, the three poets had reached the top of the steps which led from the fifth circle to the sixth, and came out as usual upon a level road. No one appeared to direct them, but by this time they were so accustomed to the ways of the place that they went confidently along the road to the right, as they had done on all the lower circles, Virgil and Statius leading the way as before, with Dante behind them, learning, as he tells us, from their conversation what will help him to write his poems.

The circle they are now on is that where the greedy are punished, and the first thing the poets saw was a tree, growing in the middle of the road, and covered with fruit which smelt most sweet and good. The lower branches of this tree were very small, and they grew out wider and stronger nearer the top, which made Dante think that no one was to climb up and gather the fruit. From the rocks above the tree flowed down a clear stream, which moistened the leaves of the tree, but did not come down to the ground. You see that the punishment in this circle, for those who had been greedy about eating and drinking while on earth, was to feel very hungry and

thirsty now, and to see fruits and hear running streams and yet not be allowed to eat or drink.

The travellers stopped under the tree, and heard a voice from among the branches giving instances of those who had not been greedy while on earth, but temperate and self-denying—like the Virgin Mary, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, thinking more of the honour of the Feast than of her own enjoyment; or the prophet Daniel, who did not eat the rich food provided for him by the King of Babylon; or John the Baptist, who lived only on locusts and wild honey. Dante was intent on gazing into the tree, and listening to this voice, when Virgil called him to go on along the road, and he obeyed following the two poets, and feeling no weariness, so interested was he in hearing them talk. And now behind them he heard the sound of weeping and of chanting, and the words were: *Open Thou my lips O Lord, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.* It was fitting that those who had opened their mouths too greedily for good things while on earth should now open them only to praise their Lord.

Soon Dante was overtaken by the crowd of souls silent and devout, who went by them, looking at them, but not speaking. They were a sad spectacle! Hunger and thirst had wasted them so much that

they looked nothing but skin and bone. Their faces were pale, and their eyes looked hollow and dark. Dante could not have recognised any of them, so changed were they from their earthly appearance ; but as they passed by, one of the shades, turning his eyes in their sunken sockets, looked fixedly at Dante, and then cried out loudly, "What grace to me is this !" Dante, who would not have known him by his face, recognised his voice, and knew him to be Forese Donati, a Florentine friend. Forese entreated him to explain the meaning of his appearance in that circle, and to tell him who were his two companions ; but Dante said he could tell nothing until Forese had told him the reason of his thin and emaciated appearance. Then the other answered that it was hunger and thirst that had so wasted him, for the sight and scent of the tree, and of the running water, was continually exciting the desire to eat and drink, which yet might not be satisfied. He said, too, that this was not the only tree on that circle, so that, going round, their pain was perpetually renewed. "I say our *pain*," he added, "and ought to say our solace"—explaining to Dante that they willingly endured the pain, because it was drawing them to God, just as Christ willingly suffered the pain of the Cross for us.

Forese then prayed Dante to explain his presence there in bodily form, which was, as usual, causing great astonishment to all the shades. And Dante told him how Virgil had come to him and rescued him from the difficulties in which his own wrongdoing had placed him, and had led him up and round the circles of the mountain, he being still living ; and he further explained that Statius was the spirit on whose account the mountain had so lately trembled and the glad song of thanksgiving had ascended to God. He added that perhaps Statius was not going on to Paradise so quickly as he might have done but for the companionship of Virgil and himself.

While this conversation was taking place, Forese and Dante were walking briskly along the road, like a ship blown along by favourable winds ; and Dante now inquired of Forèse if he knew anything about the condition of his sister, Piccarda Donati, who had passed away from the earth a little time before. Forese replied that his sister, of whom he could not say whether she had been more beautiful or more good, was already rejoicing in her crown in heaven. She was one of those who do not need any purifying pain before they go to be with God ; she had so loved and served Him here. Forese now pointed out



to Dante some of the shades, and told him something of their lives on earth : they had all sinned through gluttony and too much indulgence in good things. Dante had a talk with one of them about the writing of poetry and other things, and then all the spirits, except Forese, having satisfied their curiosity about him, quickened their pace, and went by him like a flight of birds, light as they were both from their wasted condition and from their earnest will to finish their probation.

Forese only lingered to inquire of Dante when he might hope to see him again on the Mount of Purification. Dante replied that he did not know how much longer he would have to live on earth, but that, after what he had seen, he should desire to return to the mountain even before permission was given him through death. Forese then said that he must now leave him, and go on more quickly after the others, inasmuch as time was too precious in that kingdom for him to spend any more in walking slowly with his friend ; so he departed in great haste, and left Dante with the two great poets.

Dante watched him till he was quite out of sight, and then suddenly perceived that they had come up close to another tree laden with fruit. Under the branches of this tree he saw people stand-

ing, lifting up their hands to it, as if in entreaty, and crying out words which he could not understand. These are the poor, hungry souls, uttering entreaties that their hunger may be satisfied by the tempting fruit, but, alas! it may not be. They are like children grasping at and crying after some prize held quite out of their reach ; and the spirits, disappointed and weeping, at length turn away from the tree, which has been deaf to all their prayers and tears.

When Dante and his companions came up near the great tree, they heard from among the leaves a voice warning them to pass on without coming nearer, for that this tree grew from a cutting taken from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, in the Garden of Eden, which Eve had eaten to her hurt. On hearing this, the three poets drew as near as they could to the wall of rock ; and, as they passed along, they heard the voice giving instances of gluttony being punished. After they had passed by the tree, they went on along the road for a thousand paces or so, each reflecting on what he had seen in silence, when suddenly a voice said to them, "What go ye thinking thus, ye three alone?" which so startled Dante that he shook like a frightened animal. He turned his head to look at the speaker, and beheld an angel, bright and glowing, like red-hot metal in a furnace,

who said to them, "If ye desire to ascend, ye must turn here: this way goes he who goeth after peace." The bright shining of the angel had dazzled Dante so much that he was fain to follow his companions, hearing, but not seeing; he felt wind blowing on his forehead, sweet as the air in May, when it is laden with the scent of spring flowers, and he knew that it was the angel's wings waving upon him, and removing the sixth P; then he heard the words, *Blessed are they that hunger after righteousness*, by which was expressed the blessedness of those who are temperate in all things, only desiring of the good things of life what God justly allows them.

I think this circle of the gluttonous does not require much explanation. Everyone who reads this part of the dream can apply the lesson for himself; but mark, it is not simply the eating and drinking and enjoyment of good things which is punished here; this in itself is most innocent, and is given to us, together with all our other rightful pleasures, by a loving Father, just as He gave to Adam and Eve all the trees *pleasant to the eye and good for food*, which they might lawfully enjoy. Those who sin in this respect fall into the same mistake which the money-lovers below had made, of thinking *too much* of personal enjoyment, so that they grew careless

and forgetful of their true life ; and if we allow ourselves to grow dependent upon nice food and drink, we become selfish and self-indulgent, and pain will surely follow even in this life. The sure safeguard is to remember from whom these good things come, and to learn to be contented whether we have them or not.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE END OF THE TRIAL.

“Saved, yet so as by fire.”—I CORINTHIANS iii. 15.

“When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.”

ISAIAH xliii. 2.

“No path is here, unless the pang  
Of fire ye feel, O holy souls ; pass on,  
Not deaf to that clear song that yonder rang.”

PURGATORIO xxviii. 10-12.

AND now in his dream Dante seems to be climbing up to the last circle, where he is to see the final purification of the souls before they may go to God's presence. In some ways this seems to be the worst punishment of all, for this circle is full of flames, and the spirits have to walk through the heat and scorching of fire before they may pass to Paradise. But even here Dante learnt the blessedness of pain, if it is sent by God to make us holy. You know fire is very purifying: gold and other metals are passed through fire to burn away all the worthless substances which are often mixed with them, and which we call dross, and then the gold comes out of the fire pure and shining; not a particle of it is lost. It is only the useless part, which took away from it its

worth and beauty, that is gone. So with these souls, whom Dante saw walking through the flames on the topmost circle: the fire did not really hurt them, though they felt the pain and scorching; they knew it was burning away from them all the bad and worthless parts of them, all the remaining sins, and that they would come out of it ready to be with God for ever.

When Dante and his companions came out upon the road, and found it full of flames, they were obliged to walk on a very narrow path by the side of the precipice, and Dante had to move very carefully, having the flames on his left hand and the precipice on his right. As he passed along, taking careful heed to his steps, as warned by Virgil, he heard the sound of singing, and, turning his head, saw people walking through the fire, and chanting in low voices a hymn in which they prayed God to bestow upon them the gift of purity. These souls, when on earth, had not remembered that they were made in the image of God, and that they must strive to grow in purity and likeness to Him. They had been selfish and self-indulgent, and had thought more of their own ease and pleasure than of their duty to their Master, so now they pray for purity, which will make them ready to see God.

After the hymn was ended, they raised their voices, and recited aloud instances of purity, like that of the Virgin Mary, and then resumed their low chanting and prayer ; in this way they passed their days amid the scorching flames. The sun, which was shining now on Dante's right side, threw his shadow upon the flames, and this, as before, caused great surprise among the suffering spirits. One of them came as near as he could to the edge of the fire, though careful not to step out of the burning, and prayed Dante to explain the meaning of his shadow, and this he would at once have done had not his attention been diverted by the sight of another group of spirits coming along through the fire. As soon as the two companies met, all the spirits kissed one another. It was only a brief greeting. They did not stay to enjoy one another's society, but each company went on along its way ; though, before parting, they recited loudly instances of the sins to which they had given way on earth ; then, weeping, they continued their low chanting as before.

After the new company had departed, the spirits who had been so much interested in Dante before, again turned to him with expectant looks, and he, willing to please them, once more explained how he was making this strange journey in his mortal

body to learn wisdom from above, that he might be no longer blind and erring as he had been heretofore on earth. At first the spirits were silent from amazement on hearing Dante's story, and stood just as simple countrymen, who have lived always among mountains, stand silent and bewildered amid the streets and strange sights of a city. But they soon recovered from their surprise, and were able to reply to Dante's questions as to who they were who were thus suffering among the flames. They told him of the sins into which they had fallen on earth, and the spirit who had first spoken to him revealed himself to Dante as being Guido Guinicelli, a celebrated Italian poet, for whom Dante had a great admiration. He had been one of the first to write beautiful poems in the Italian language, for up to that time most of the best poetry had been written in Latin, the old language of Italy.

Dante was delighted to see Guinicelli, whom he calls his "father," and father also of other writers superior to himself, but he could not approach closer to him to show his affection because of the fire. He went along for some time without speaking, and then opened his lips to assure Guinicelli of his love, and of his willingness to serve him in any way. The other, touched by his affectionate looks and



words, asked Dante why he felt so warmly towards him. The traveller replied that it was because of his sweet poems, which would be dear to Italians as long as their language lasted. Guinicelli then pointed out to Dante a spirit in front, who, he said, was a better poet than himself. He told Dante also that he could never forget the loving words he had said to him, and prayed him, as he was to have the privilege of going on to heaven to behold our Lord Jesus, that he would say one prayer for him to their Master and Saviour. He then disappeared in the depths of the fire, as a fish disappears from sight in deep waters, and left Dante to say a few words to the other poet whom he had pointed out.

After this, an angel of God joyfully appeared to them, and, as you know, it was the custom on every circle to chant one of the Beatitudes ; so here the most beautiful of all the blessings is pronounced—*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* After singing these words, the angel said : “ You can go no farther, holy souls, until you have felt the fire ; enter it, therefore, and be not deaf to the singing on the other side.” Here is a terrible trial to Dante’s faith and courage ! Hitherto, except on the third circle, where he had to pass through the smoke, he has not himself experienced the pain which all the spirits were

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enduring ; but now, before he can reach the last flight of steps which are to lead him to Paradise, he must pass through the burning fire, which covered the whole road save the narrow path at the edge of the precipice. It is only the pure in heart who may go to see God. Dante has to learn this lesson now through his own experience, as he had been learning it from the sight of others all up the mountain. Dante stood perplexed, gazing into the flames, and vividly picturing to himself the human bodies of those whom he had formerly seen burnt to death on earth.

His kind guides turned towards him, and Virgil very greatly encouraged him to venture in by reminding him of worse difficulties through which he had safely led him, and that he must trust him more, not less, now that they were so near to God. He assured him that, though painful, the fire had no power to destroy him ; it could not injure so much as a hair of his head even if he were to stay in it for a thousand years. To prove this Virgil urged him to try the edge of his garment in the flame. He bade him put aside all fear, and venture boldly in. But our poor Dante stood hard and immovable ; then Virgil, a little vexed, reminded him that Beatrice, his beloved lady, was on the other side of the wall of fire. All other arguments had failed, but at this name Dante

gave way at once, and turned to his wise leader, who raised his head, saying, "Now, shall we stay on this side?" and then smiled at Dante, as one does at a child who has been persuaded to do something disagreeable by the promise of a treat. Then Virgil entered the fire; Dante followed him, and Statius came last, by Virgil's request. It was a very terrible pain, but Dante's "sweet father," to comfort him, went on talking only of Beatrice, and said he seemed to see her eyes already. They were guided by a voice which they heard singing on the other side, and, paying heed to this sound, they came out of the fire at the foot of the flight of steps. There a light so bright shone from the angel who stood by the steps that it prevented Dante from seeing, but he recognised the words sung by the angel to be: *Come, ye blessed of my Father.* He added that the evening was closing in, and that they must not stop, but hasten their upward steps before the sun should quite disappear.

So on they went, up the last stair, which was to lead them to the summit of the mountain. And now our story is almost ended. You remember that in the "Pilgrim's Progress," when Christian enters the gates of the Celestial City, we do not follow him further. With music sounding, and light shining upon him, he disappears from our sight within the

walls of the City of which the Bible tells us that we are all to be citizens.

So now I do not propose that we should ascend with Dante to heaven. All the suffering is over. At the top of the last ascent he comes out into a lovely country full of sweet flowers and trees; he hears the singing of birds; soft airs of spring blow upon him, and clear streams flow through the land. This is indeed a beautiful place, although it is not heaven. Perhaps it is the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve led their happy life before they had sinned and were driven out from their home. Here, in this sweet place, Beatrice at last appears to Dante's eyes, and with her he passes away from our sight to the blessed heaven, where he may at last see God.

Here, then, ends Dante's dream for us. We have followed him thus far on his journey, and have learned from it some of the lessons which were to help him when he awoke from his vision and found himself once more on earth, amid the ordinary surroundings, the toil and effort, the enjoyments, the temptations, and the sorrows of daily life. If we have followed him in thought, we too have had a vision into what underlies this life, and have learned how sin brings its own punishment, and how pain may be blessed to us in bringing us nearer to God. We

cannot know, as I told you at the beginning, whether the life beyond is just what Dante imagined it to be ; but what we do know very certainly is that our life here is a pilgrimage up a steep Hill Difficulty, and that we have many painful things to see and endure in the course of our ascent ; and we also know that our Father in His love provides for us many resting-places on our way, that the difficulty of the climb gets less the higher we ascend, that God's angels are near us to help us on our way, that love and counsel from our friends strengthen and gladden us as we go on, that our prayers and praises keep us in communion with God, and that when our work is done and our journey over we shall come at last to the peace and joy of Heaven.

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